Buck Fever

HENRY MORTON ROBINSON

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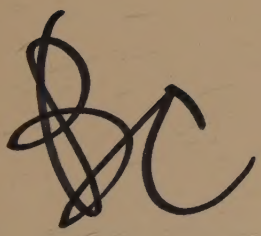

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Buck fever

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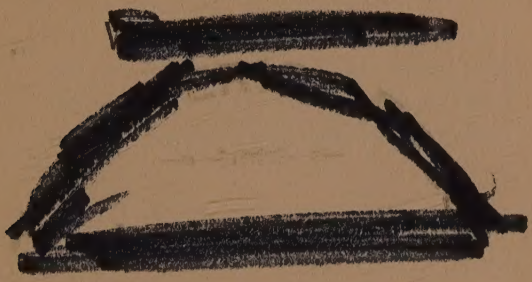
By

HENRY MORTON ROBINSON



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TO
JOHN ERSKINE

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BUCK FEVER

Words are damp cartridges that poets use
To charge the barrel of their smooth-bored lines,
Then, gun in hand, they stalk with smoldering fuse
Across world meadows, sense-alert for signs
Of flying wonder and the furry hare
Of ermine beauty that eludes their aim;
And hungry, home they come, their only fare
Fragments and visions of uncaptured game.

Sometimes they glimpse in groves of shadowy wood
A crimson buck with gold horns on his head;
Trembling, they aim; but seas of mortal blood
Swim in their eyes; and feverishly, instead
Of sending straight steel through the polished bore,
They snap both triggers on a metaphor.

Narratives

HONEY-BUGLER'S RETREAT

My bugle has a silver lip,
An iron bell, a flare of gold,
And when I let *Assembly* rip
Rear-admirals pass out cold.
On battle-wagon decks I'm known
As Blow-them-cuckoo Bugling Pete,
The sailor with the cello tone,
The honey-bugler of the Fleet.

Of all a sailor's onshore duties
Primest is knocking off recruities;
You bunk at all the best hotels
And paralyze the alfalfa belles
Who never saw a service button
Except on some cold Army mutton;
You rate subsistence, extra pay
And travel Pullman all the way,
And if your skipper knows his packet
Recruiting is a *beaucoup* racket.

Man, I felt plenty salty when
They *de*tailed me with Chief McGlenn
(A cox, a first-class bosun's mate
And four young gunners made us eight)
To weigh our best recruiting anchors
And raid those middle-western tankers.
The Chief read off our shipping order:
Proceed to the Nebraska border

And said, "That listens pretty nifty,
Them corn-fed Rollos make good sailors,
They're tired of being buckwheat flailers,
We won't come back with less'n fifty."
"Righto!"
We grabbed our bags and duffle
And steamed ten watches over prairies
(Chowing in diners, a la truffle)
Through wheat-fields yellower than canaries,
And landed somewhere in the hay
The morning of the second day.
"Fall in!"
We fell; a double squad.
"Sound off!"
I sounded off, by God
In twelve assorted flats and sharps,
I played like seven golden harps,
I played like ninety violins
Tucked under ninety cast-iron chins—
Reveille, Colors, Pay Call, Taps,
Mess, Assembly and perhaps
Tunes that never had been blown
Before in any turnip town.
A hundred men means one recruit
Five hundred heard *this* Piper's flute.
And then the Chief wig-wagged the sign
To wipe her clean, so he could speak,
He'd moistened up his selling line
And had it bulging in his cheek.
"Now all you bully boys ashore,
Whose jaw ain't glass, whose hair ain't curled,
Most likely have been hankering for

A chance to see the world—
The seven seas, the tropic climes
Banana trees and rubber limes,
Where East meets West, and chimpanzees
Have purple tails and orange fleas,
Where hula girls shake their fandangoes
In educational native tangoes;
Come! Join the Navy, Learn a Trade
And See the World While Being Paid—"
And all that bilge. But need I tell
How three young apple-knockers fell,
Were signed and shipped before the sun
Its bloody sweating course had run?

Like every Navy job, we soon
Learned how to push it through by noon,
And after we had bagged a pair
Of 'cruities, we would take the air
To give the girls a looking over,
And boy! I mean we stood in clover.
Stand by and let this sailor pipe
The praises of those skirts we met,
Corn-nourished, luscious, not too ripe,
Just perfect poultry! We would get
Smooth stock like that in every port,
Tender, yet game for sailor sport.
At dances they would jam the hall
To greet us, and we'd take in tow
The dame we fancied most of all
And teach her what a girl should know.
Sweet mammas, fleshed like velvet floss,
We always threw them for a loss!

A month slipped by, and one blithe morning
We landed in a burg called Corning.
Thanks to my brass and the big-chief's bull
Our quota sheet was nearly full.
"Now men," says Chief, "we're almost done,
We've filled our book and had our fun;
Our train pulls out of here at five
Tomorrow morning. Look alive,
Just stow the duffle near the track
We're leaving and we won't be back.
We'll catch the Eastbound on the fly
And chow tomorrow night in Chi,
Let's shanghai one more Prairie-Willie
And then sign off— Pete, blow 'em silly."

I opened wide the singing tin
And blew a Hallelujah blast
Like Judgment Day was coming in
And coming mighty fast.
And soon that little street was thick
With boys and girls. I did my trick
Bugling tunes that couldn't get written
Biting off notes that never were bitten;
Then Chief climbed on, and glibly spieled
Of service in the foreign field,
Of furloughs and the bang-up grub
(*Which* song-and-dance spears many a dub)
I watched my buddies circulate
Among the crowd to make a killing;
Thought I, "I'll fix me up a date
To swing tonight on someone's gate;

That blonde looks more than willing——"

Then like a dark bird on the rise,
A strange gale blew across my eyes
And at my side I heard a voice
Like a horizon choir
Whose song was quiet as a cloud
Brushing a silver wire,
And on my arm a hand was laid
Trembling, but sweetly unafraid;
And then I saw the brown-eyed maid.

"You've come at last," was all she said.
What could the maiden mean?
My words ran dry, and shadowy lead
Lay on my lips, my blood sank dead
And the trees went strangely green.

I plunged deep down through seas of brown
And heard a russet lyric sung,
And I, a brassy bugling clown,
Knew that the world was white and young
As the first pear tree must have known
When the first spring gave its buds a tongue.

If all the women who have lain
Wide-eyed and loveless through the dark
Till a stale morning break again
Could be distilled to one gold spark,
That spark would be an arid seed,
Flameless beside this maiden's need.

"Tonight," she said, "within the grove
Of cottonwoods, at eight,
I shall be ready with my love,
O Sailor, be not late!
O Sailor, be not late," she sighed;
The Chief sang, "Let that brass horn slide!"

They say I played the strangest air
That ever a sailor's trumpet blew,
A something not quite *Eyes of Vair*
Or *Sailor, are you true?*
A song that made the bugle's flair
Seem crystal and cool-blue,—
A happy sapphire echo of
"I shall be ready with my love."

* * * * * * * *

She stood beneath a full-sailed tree
And waited for my hand,
Nor even murmured, "Follow me,"
But led me through a wheat-filled sea,
Distant from any land.

Into the wheat and through the wheat,
Over a plow-keeled plain
I walked with unremembering feet
Across a beach of grain.
I heard the dance-hall saxophone

Play *Big Boy* with a Beale Street moan,
While little winds along the ground
Ran on ahead, and round and round.

We came upon a flowering tree
Whose petals were warm snow,
The sax played *Big Boy, cuddle me*
And never let me go.
She turned in silence, on her face
A young star broke its wand;
She laid her down in the deep grass
Like a white leaf on a pond.

Sickle flashing in beauty's grain,
White bough of love's root-tangled tree,
Earth-night that will not come again
In this dim-branched eternity,
And through the wheat the jiggling bleat
Of *Big Boy, cuddle me.*

We slept, and with a masted scarf
Of cloud we drifted down a stream,
Leaving behind the rickety wharf
Of earth, we floated in a dream
Through which a happy-needled laugh
Embroidered a fine seam.

I think there is a little hill
That rises, willow-clothed, in sleep

And from its side brave speckled deer
Clip herbs, and waters leap;
And round its base, thick-coiling snakes
And wild dark bison creep. . . . .

Oh bison tread, ye shake my pillow,
Stampede me not!
I woke and heard
A sound that came not from the willow,
A muffled purring, faintly blurred;
I listened and it came again:
The Eastbound, purple-morning train!

Around us the Nebraska dawn
Came stepping like a blue-eyed fawn
I heard again the steel stampede
It clamored louder, "Sailor, speed!"
(And echoed, "Bleed, frail sister, bleed")
Among the flowers she lay in sleep
For hands too white, for words too deep;
So I, more sailor than a man,
Kissed both her eyes, arose and ran.

With pistons pounding at my heels
I cleared the wheat in loping bounds,
I knew the way a rabbit feels
When chased by bloody braying hounds.
The fireman pulled a warning bell,
I punished my lungs and ran like hell

And thought, "Oh, shall I ever run
To anything or anyone
As fast as I am running now
Away from her to whom the vow
Of faithfullest love was made, and broken
Without a warning word or token?
Sailor, turn back! love so begun
Must not end so"; the bell clanged "Run,
What'll your Chief and maties say
If you get landlocked in the hay?"
I pounded on; I heard the brakes
And thought, "I hope she never wakes;
Love 'em and leave 'em is the sailor's game,
But Christ, I wish I knew her name."

The engine grunted to a stop.
"Get going now, you flop-eared casket,
Fight 'em sailor until you drop,
Make that train or bust a gasket!
I heard the engine start again
And raced it, one fagged running pain
Past the station, along the track,
While a young wind pleaded, "Back, turn back."
Till, shivering like a one-lunged Ford
I leapt and threw myself aboard,
And turning, saw in that blue morning
The last I ever saw of Corning.

THE PORK-AND-BEANER

The Lily passes out,

THE Lily lay wilting in the dahlia-papered room
Tired Lily, mired Lily, Lily palely damp,
Her stem was breaking but she flushed with fever bloom
And she laughed a little, coughed a little, "Guess I'm going, Champ."
"Don't go Lily kid, and leave me all alone"——
But she started going, smiling, and she went without a groan.

In parades the Madam, and she fumes, "Now who's to pay?
This Lily's sick a month and dies, without a cent behind her;
Well, up she goes and out she goes is all that I can say,
The City handles such as her—I can't do any kinder.
I fed her and I bed her, but I don't make coffins,

The King's Libra

And she got just what I said she'd get
for playing round with ruff'ns."

"Ruffians ma'am, is right ma'am," sneered Dr. Meiklebohn
And eyed the Champ, but *he* was dumb and never let a peep.
With that they lugged the Lily out and laid her on a stone
Like an unclaimed umbrella on a Lost and Found heap.
"The medicos'll want her for pulmonary diseases"
Cadaver Charley gurgled, "and a pretty case, by Jesus."

and is sent to the City Morgue,

where the caretaker appreciates a good thing.

"You'll bury her?" Cadaver grinned, "and where's your hearse and casket?
If you mean it, there's my friend McGee, he'll do the job up proper
For fifty bucks; yes, cash of course—why, what fool to ask it!
Mac don't embalm on credit;—eh? you haven't got a copper?
Well, I'll give you till tonight at twelve, and then the sawbones get her,

The Champ offers to bury her and is referred to McGee, B. J. Undertaker,

She's yours till then, but after that—
I can't do any better."

who demands cash.

McGee B. J., 9 Court Street, was a pious, vealy fellow
Obliging within limits, but the limits must be cash.
"I'll lay her out for fifty bucks." (Pale Lily, greenly yellow
Who'll wind your stem in linen?)
"Hey, you pork-and-beaning trash,
That sob-stuff don't go down with me,
I've got to see the money,
I wouldn't trust a pug ten cents, not even J. J. Tunney."

So the Champ hits up St. Barnaby's Pastor for a loan, but—

Said the Pastor of St. Barnaby's: "My son, in your affliction
I sympathize, condole, and will (within my parish) proffer
My most—*what*? Sir, that quite exceeds parochial jurisdiction

A moral question arises.

For if the lady died in sin, I must withdraw the offer.
Now *did* the lady die in sin? Come now, speak up my son—
Well, blasphemy won't save her soul or right the wrong you've done."

"In this you were quite orthodox and sage," the Bishop pattered.
"There was a principle involved, the persons scarcely mattered.
Thus, not "did these two lovers, love?" rather, let's begin
With "Gutter lyric greenly cold, did you die in sin?"
Up catechists and at her now: 'Did you die in sin?'
'*Did* you, that's the principle, DID you die in sin?'

In which the Bishop upholds the Pastor.

"It's just a year ago, come June," the Champ thought, "that I found her
Standing by a Hoop-La booth with dagoes all around her.
The Fair's in town so I'll breeze down and tap a bulging pocket
Or lift a jewelled Ingersoll, or heavy sugar locket.
So down he went and crashed the gate, and stood where first he'd seen her
And wondered who'd loan fifty bucks to a fourth-rate pork-and-beaner.

The Champ decides to do his stuff at the Fair Grounds.

Toss 'em in and ring 'em out; Hoop-la, try your skill boys,
See the three-tailed zebra, folks, direct from Mindanao,

He hears the Spielers; among them Mickey Wheeler,

Mount the Derby Steeplechaser, every ride's a spill boys,
Ma'am, for cancer, use this salve prescribed by Dr. Mayo.
And then arose a greater voice, the voice of Mickey Wheeler
The Boston Dirk, the Come-on Kid, the brassy-larynxed spieler.

who challenges all-comers in behalf of Socker Bloom the Big-Time Puncher.

"Socker Bloom gents, on my right
(Socker, show your powder puff)
Socker challenges tonight
Any lad who likes to fight
Frequent, fast and rough.
Here's the offer: four full rounds
Queensbr'y rules, one minute rest,
Weight, one hundred and fifty pounds
And, gents, to add a sporting zest
We offer twice times twenty-five
Dollars to any man alive
Who'll go the whole four rounds and lick
The Socking Mr. Bloom. Speak quick
You local marvels with the gloves
No scrappers here? All turtle-doves?
Come, bust the Socker on the lamp—

Why bleed me, if it ain't the Champ!
When did you wander into camp?"

"What's that to you? I'll lick your man."
"Why, you can't fight, you Also-ran,
This bloom'll knock *you cock-eyed* blotto
Whaddya think this game is, Lotto?"

The Pork-and-Beaner accepts the defi. The Spieler scoffs,

"Give me some gloves, I'll lick your man"
"I say you can't."
"I say I can."
"What d'you weigh now?"
"Less'n Bloom."
"You're on"
"O. K."
"Gents, lots of room,
Single admission fifty cents
Step up and see this pork-and-beaner
Knocked parallel with the arena.
Fight of the evening will commence
At once, immediately, gents,
Step up and see four mauling scenes

but takes him on.

Entitled 'Socker Spills the Beans'."

Chorus of Spectators.

"I know him, sure. They call him Champ
He couldn't lick a postage stamp
Travels around with a kid named Lily,
T. B. sure, but a sweet-faced filly,
What do I think? I think she's nuts,
This Champ's got neither brains nor guts,
Fights for a sawbuck now and then
Been licked by all the local men
Never won a decision yet,
Why Bloom won't even raise a sweat
Putting him out. . . Well, here they come
The Champ could use a shot of rum . . .
They're shaking hands. Champ pick your door
I'll give you three rounds, three, no more."

The fight

The Lily shall sleep in a grassy low bed,

And I'll bathe her tired feet in a gold-pebbled stream
And I'll carve her a little white stone for her head
And fan her to sleep with a close-woven dream.

begins; both men spar for an opening.

Remember the day that we went to the beach
And I promised I'd look for a regular job?
And you wept on my heart, and we clung each to each
So weary we were. . . . Now fight, you big slob. . . .

Clip, zig, one, two,
Jab, parry,
Follow through,
Reached . . . nose
Missed . . chin
Hog fat,
Bum gin.
Crash him Bloom!
Mash him Bloom!
Lay the bastard in a tomb. . . .

They mix it.

Oh, in the tomb

The Champ takes a count of seven

There are no cursing arc-lights or cruel spielers, no marrying or giving in marriage, no listening for footsteps outside of dahlia-papered rooms . .
Tired Lily, mired Lily, Lily all my own
Don't go Lily kid and leave me all alone. . . . .

But old McGee he says to me
Get the fifty and we'll see
Old McGee knows what to do
Arises Jab . . . parry . . . Fol . . . low . . . . . through
Cling, Cling, Smack, Ding
Ding, Zong
Zong,
Ding.

Not did these two lovers love; rather, let's begin
With "Gutter lyric, greenly cold, did you die in sin?"

and is knocked down again; Father, Son and Holy Ghost
On a stone they laid the Host,
No, it's not a grassy stone,
Swing your censers, it's a throne.
Bishop, dump the incense in,

Lily darling where've you been?
Swing, swing, censered wing,
Zing, Zong
Zong, Ding.

struggling to his feet as the bell saves him.

Sleep one more night, cold Lily, on your stone,
They cannot take you from me, you are mine;
Oh help me now, lean forward on your throne
I'll go the distance if you'll give the sign . . .

He comes out groggy for Round Two.

Haw Haw Haw
Bloom socked him on the jaw

Gets an artistic battering from Bloomy,

I cannot hold these poor hands up to serve you,
I ask forgiveness for the cringing past,
I do not now, I never did deserve you,
He'll kill me Lily, give me strength to last.
They called me champ because I was a joke, Lil.
No true champ, Pale One, never any good,
Always a pork-and-beaner, always broke, Lil,

and fifty-five seconds later

With never any dough, or decent food.
Oh, when I fail you now, the docs'll
get you
And cut those places that I used to
love,
My only sin, sweet Lily, was to let you
Die in that room you were so weary of.

takes the full count.

I cannot hold these hands up any
longer
Lily, I shall not see your face again,
Not now, not ever, shall I be the
stronger,

Sponge and quick curtain

Bloom's laid him stiff gents . . . . .
seven, eight, nine, ten!

I.
EDEN OF THE EAVES

EDEN OF THE EAVES

Our low bed near the window, and your hair
A wheat-fan on the pillow as you sleep;
Your dress flung passionately at our only chair
And cream put on the window-sill to keep.
Pigeons and chimneys and a wide-seamed floor,
Mice, and two crocus bulbs were our estate—
Oh, attic Eden, sealed forevermore,
Your fruit is plucked and I am desolate.

Old lyric door of love, swing open now!
Show me again our Eden of the eaves:
It's one thin blanket, and the skylight bough
Spreading its stars above our heads like leaves;
And two young lovers floating side by side
Just as sleep caught them in its outbound tide.

REFUGE

Lie quietly; the wild sweet storm has passed;
Its dying thunder whispers in our veins;
A drowsy refuge have we found at last
In this white atrophy of sleeping rains.
Now heart to heart, steeped in the cordial bath
Of love's first warmth, let sleep and silence spread
Their branching dreams above the secret path
Where only lovers, after love, may tread.

The draughty smoke-stack world, the littered
streets,
Are quite shut out; the cries and chaos cease;
The fading day, a dim mirage, retreats
Wrapped in a humeral veil of silver fleece;
There is no sound except a heart that beats
Against a heart exhausted and at peace.

PRELUDE

JUST before the rain comes in August torrents,
Green bull-frogs jump with a splash into the pond-lilies,
And inquisitive mud-turtles poke out their noses, asking,
"Come now—really—what is going on here?"
Along the shore slim locusts shiver expectantly
Warning the birds to get ready, and the tree-bugs also;
And the sedge-flowers open their perfume-valves a trifle wider,
Quickening the air with sweetness; and the forest
Vibrates like a harp string.

Just before you come to me in a torrent of beauty
A prelude of wild music whistles through my branches,
Warning me that you will soon be here, drenching me with your sweetness,
And my heart, like a deep lake, is ominously quiescent,
As a passive pond is, before the passionate rain stampedes it.

MUTE

Will you believe, and try to understand
That when I say *I love you* the dear words
Full as they are, seem only wistful chords,
Poor wingless sounds—yet all I can command.
The thunderous music of a thousand strings
Sings in my heart, orchestral but unheard,
And all my longing like a broken bird
Must fly to you at last with crumpled wings.

Love, would you hear the high triumphant song
That like an eagle climbs with golden crest
Against the sky with pinions white and strong?
Come, lay your head upon this vibrant breast,
Bursting with music like a singing shell——
A murmuring conch, an anguished, tongueless bell.

DREAM WITHIN A DREAM

Then in compulsion and with ancient fears
Secretly I arose and walked alone
Out of my house and down steep listening stairs
Into the first day-shallows of the sun.

And saw a dream that I had come to find
On this terrain of morning-colored stone,
A shade that was more shadowless than wind
Dripping slow fogs of a forgotten dawn.

Fogs are not flowers that a hand may feel;
I touched the slim anterior shade; it slipt
Out through my fingers, up the birdless hill—
Calling, I wakened; and unanswered, wept.

ATTIC TO LET

Miserable, passionate, fifth-flight room,
Your gas-jet lights her empty tomb,
And I shall never beat your door
In tears and anguish anymore.

Now, clumping down the narrow stairs,
My heart feels the thick soles it wears,
And knows it never will again
Race to you barefoot through the rain.

SEPARATION

Now I know why the lonely horse
Whinnies beside the empty stall;
Now I know why the hollow corse
Lies so desolate and still;

And why the living clover root
Dies when thé sickle makes it hay—
Oh, even unremembering fruit
Withers when severed from the tree.

AUTUMN PARTING

Before this hill can sail again
In green, it must be brown and gray;
And all the glory it has been
Must pass through winter into clay.

This linden we have lain beneath,
This earth that we have loved upon,
Are mingled in one icy breath
And gouged by one deep thumb of stone.

And hearing now the bleak alarum
Of drum clouds prophesying grief,
I think no leaf will ever come
To take the place of this dead leaf.

ALL I REMEMBER

All I remember is the well
  You were to me at first,
And how you wept to hear me tell
  My litany of thirst.

Under the hills today I found
  A meadow-pool run dry;
The year lay stiffly on the ground
  And snow hung from the sky.

PRAYER TO SLEEP

The ripened day drops from its bough
And one star sings in night's blue nest,
The sleep ship hoists its sail, and now
I lay me down, but not to rest.

There shall come dreams of dominance,
Of royal capes and horsed command
Marching in columns, lance on lance,
Into a valleyed, captive land.

There shall come auguries of birds
In dextral flight above my head,
And strophic choruses of words
Will chant about my bed.

I shall climb leafy parapets
And looking boyward, see my days
Lost in a swamp of violets
Wet with an early morning haze.

And you will come to smile and stand
White sentinel within my door,
And I shall feel the sharp white sand
Of anguish covering my floor.

The sleep flag flutters on the mast
And dreams crowd palely thick, like snow.
The waking shore is overcast,
O, let the sleep wind blow!

MISSING DREAM

It did not come, so I arose
  Left my quiet room,
Went as a sleep-walker goes
  To a guilty tomb;

Waded through a foggy stream,
  Climbed a rainy hill,
There I found the missing dream
  Strangled, cold, still.

"Will you never come again?
  Little dream?" I said;
All I heard was the dead rain
  Falling on the dead.

ECHO PERILOUS

"Evéillons au hasard les échos de ta vie"
Alfred de Musset.

RESONANT oak, I will not wake
One reed-thin echo of her name,
Lest all your happy foliage break
Remembering, into flame.

The midnight oarsman in his skiff
Surveys in fear the ominous sky,
And hastening past the haunted cliff
Lets sleeping echoes lie.

TO A CONTEMPORARY, ONCE LOVED

I WISH our years were calendars apart;
That one of us were old, the other young;
I should not now be choking in my heart
An ancient terror with an acid tongue.

This acid anguish is not love turned sour;
(*That* milk was chalky powder long ago)
And every grain of love's white wholesome flour
Has long been bolted down by time's black crow.

But seeds-of-you plant bright weeds in my life,
Blanching the mean stalks I must cultivate;
The stones-you-are have dulled my plough's bent
knife;
I wish I had ploughed sooner, or more late.

Without you, this ripe world were my gold fruit;
Its juices mine, a sweet pulp at my lips;
But now in hunger, miserably mute,
I gnaw what you will toss me, rind or pips.

Old agony, why do you dog me here?
Your footfall is the only sound I dread.
Your beauty is the only ghost I fear;
I wish that either one of us were dead.

DARK WICK

You are a dark wick in the urn
Of beauty, not yet touched with fire,
A holocaust that should not burn
On any finite pyre.

Mortals have held the match until
Their fingers scorched; but you, yet dark
Await the star-ignited spill,
The impregnating spark.

There swims a blue flame in a wave;
Plunge now into that burning sea,
Or smoulder in a tepid grave
Beneath a paralytic tree.

II.
EARTH—CANONIZED

EARTH-CANONIZED

This is high saintliness, I know:
To love earth's sacramental snow;

To float face toward the sky and make
Clerestory of a sapphire lake;

To cling all day to wave-wracked hulls
Hearing the antiphon of gulls;

To tell, amid green rocks and weeds,
Decades of periwinkle beads;

Earth's saints are those who to the last
Cling to beauty's broken mast,

Then striking boldly seaward, reach
The smooth-stoned slope of heaven's beach.

SUBURBAN DAWN

NOTHING is paler than suburban dawn;
Nothing in mountain forests have I seen
More shyly tranquil than the dappled fawn
Of daybreak, crossing squares of dusty green.
Dawn is a white doe pasturing between
The hedge and house, the sidewalk and the lawn,
Cropping the berried bush of darkness clean,
While all the curtains in the town are drawn.

Over the pavement lean the dreaming trees
With lashes of their drowsy lids turned down;
Brown ivy-sparrows tune their morning glees;
The day is trying on her newest gown—
And dons it quickly, hearing on the breeze
The whistle of the first train into town.

JANUARY THAW

Marrow-rime melts in every bony twig,
Snowdrifts ascend in slow smoke through the trees,
The little hill puts on her emerald wig
And the cramped mountains stretch their iron knees.
Somewhere within the icy-jeweled cyst
Of January, June begins to sing
Like a pale princess, signalling to spring
To break the spell of winter's amethyst.

The brook, a singing mouse, begins to run;
The melting ice-cat barely lifts a paw;
Drugged by the drowsy acorns of the sun
The frost-hawk slumbers, and no wind-crows caw;
And spring, that spinner of green joy, has spun
Her first thread in this January thaw.

WATER

GREEN tug on the river,
  Sturdy as a plough,
With a brass stern-capstan
  And a rope-nosed prow;

Slant-funneled chaser
  With a clean-shaved jaw,
Ripping through sea-planks
  Like a bright steel saw;

Raft on a turtle-pound,
  Moored to a willow,
Sleeping all summer
  On a lily-pad pillow;

If you must have water
  Which will you take:
Ocean, or river,
  Or lily-choked lake?

INDIAN SUMMER: WOODSTOCK

Fox-grape and wine-sap simmer in the haze
Of brown noons steeping in their own slow sun;
The panting beagle guarantees to raise
A dozen rabbits for each new-oiled gun;
Corn is all stubble, and the stoic oak
Secretly mourns the acorns it has lost;
Over the pasture swims a purple smoke,
And the last blue aster waits the year's first frost.

Summer treads gentlest when she breaks her vow
Of green, before the leafless days begin.
"Summer is passing," ruminates the cow;
"Summer is over," groans the apple bin;
Yet here, but for red chevrons on this bough,
I might have fancied June was coming in.

THE PHILOSOPHER OAK

Hickory leaves are motley fellows,
Their mourning bands are rakish yellows;

Pied maples fall in sanguine red,
Cheerful till every leaf is dead;

The birch puts off her crown of green
And nudely white, lies down a queen;

But stoic oak leaves paint no lie—
They merely burn to brown, and die.

DORY-DREAMS

BENEATH my dory's keel float shadowed forms
Frail, tenuous, like mists a dreamer sees;
And seaweed hawsers, holding through tall storms
Anchor my boat as tap-roots anchor trees.

No surface flurries stir my deep-sunk dreams;
Only the ground-swell, with a falling slide
Swirls through my phantom forest in pale streams
Of loveliness refreshed by each new tide.

What forms are these that trouble Beauty's sleep?
Leaning across the gunwale of my boat
All day I watch the forms that fade and float—
Unfathomed dreams in an unfathomed deep.

Peering till dark I watch, and watch in vain;
But on the morrow I shall watch again.

GREEN HILL

THREE eye-stops from my hillside to my sea!
Marshland, turf dunes, and deep implicit green,
On emerald plates I copy you, all three,
Hill, ocean, and the green salt-marsh between.

Sleep or awake I always find you, hill;
One clovered peak of a round-shouldered range.
Dreaming at night I see you, green and still,
Ever the same, for you will never change.

Always a boy is lying in the grass,
Whittling, and whistling like a brook, alone;
He shouts at clouds and starlings as they pass;
I listen, and the boy's voice is my own.

He calls; "Do you remember the green hours
Upon this hill washed with green windiness,
Buried in larkspur, sucking bitter-sours,
Do you remember?" and I answer, "Yes."

I have remembered hill, and marsh, and sea!
Though other faiths and memories lie dead
Though love's new edge has long been dulled for me,
And all the prayers that I shall say, are said;

I have remembered more of you than all
My other memories of home and youth
I never heed when other voices call,
For they would claim me with a partial truth.

But you, the last of all my certainties,
Low hill, dear marshland, and you, lonely coast,
I cling to you as earth clings to her trees,
Be with me now, for now I need you most.

COLLEGE TWILIGHT

Turf and hard games—and now this quiet room
Deep-windowed, valanced by a mellow oak;
Gold bindings luminous in the green-leaf gloom,
A low chair and a blunt brown pipe to smoke.
The scuffle of the college yard is stilled
By supper silence cool as a ripe pear;
The campus poplars, gracilely weak-willed
Find no young breeze to yield to, anywhere.

Such ripe contentment drowses on this bough
Nuzzling its leaf-nose deep into my page,
That I am pulseless and unpassioned now,
Insolent in my cloistral heritage,
Knowing myself for one hour to have been
Luckier and more quiet than other men.

VOX CLAMANTIS

THERE is a voice that wakes the drowsy brain
As though a hand had swept a silver string,
Resonant, bright and sudden as the wing
Of a white bird flying through the rain.
Listen, my heart, the voice comes full again!
Tranquil and clear as from a buried spring
Flowing from rocks where secret rivers sing
Espousal chants of mystery and pain.

Its echo bathes in every dripping well;
Its shadow slips at dawn from tree to tree;
But who or what it is I cannot tell,
Save this: its voice is love's antiphony
Tolling forever like a crystal bell
Sunk in the depths of some blue distant sea.

TABERNACLE

"O Seigneur, donnez-moi le force et le courage
De contempler mon corps et mon coeur sans dégoût."
Charles Baudelaire.

Cower! the dark Evictor comes
Twirling his dispossessor's key,
Purging this melancholy slums
Of its stale tenantry.

His foot is on the unswept stair,
He grips the sweaty knob,
He will not haggle with your prayer
Or bargain with your sob.

But he is merciful in this
Last tender compromise:
He blots both eyes with a dark kiss——,
Oh, let him blot your eyes,

Lest, when you stumble towards the door
After the shadowy Finger falls,
You see your squalorous bed and floor,
Cracked ceilings, and smirched walls.

SOUL TO BODY

Drift idly now, vexed oar, the race is over;
Relax, bent fingers, on the purse and plough;
Crumble, glazed clay, among the roots of clover;
It is not likely you will need me now.

Nor does it matter that I loved you dearly;
I would not choose to leave you, but I must.
The room is dark, I cannot see you clearly,
I too am fading into homeless dust.

I shall dissolve as you are now dissolving;
Farewell, I shall not trouble you again;
You will not know me, when through mists revolving,
You rise in dew, and I descend in rain.

WAY OF ALL SHIPS

SHORT as a shower are the Doric days
Of lyric promise and heroic mood,
When life is yet a ship-upon-the-ways
And love is making music in the blood!
Too menial-cheap the compromise we make;
Too shamefully we acquiesce, enthralled
By dingy cargoes—we who meant to take
Nothing but freights of gold and emerald.

To no star true, we are by self betrayed;
We give a kingdom and receive a crust;
The salt of life, the wine of song we trade
For bilge and seaweed, barnacles and rust.
Until above the keel our first strength laid,
The tattered canvas moulders into dust.

III.
THE POOL

THE POOL

Lillian, whose veins ran snow and Thasian wine
Lay reading in the depths of our canoe,
And as we floated past a sedgy shrine
Arched by a trinity of weeping birch,
She read, "The blessed damozel lean'd out from heaven."

Now paddling upward on the lazy stream
We ferried under leafy canopies,
Past rolling meadows, fat and verdurous farms
Until a land of sylvan loveliness
Found only on New England's upper streams,
Lay stretched around—a land of summer dreams—
Of cressy bankments, shot with cardinal;
And celandines on slender pedicels
Blent with the feathery foam of spikenard
Emerald and ochre, waving shard on shard;
It was a land of osiers bending down
To kiss the stream's capricious russet lips;
Of elms and larches, laced with the satin leaves
Of grapevines, flung in wild luxuriance.—

Through latticed maple branches I
Could see a bit of china sky,

Now blue, now white, as errant cloud
Veiled heaven within a fleecy shroud.
Above, unseen, the oriole
Breathed in a liquid caracole
Of melody; the ripening wheat
Surcharged with its odorous sweet
Rivalled the willow's pliant ease
In genuflecting to the breeze;
And every rustling zephyr spelled
In accents delicately belled;
"Ye who love Beauty, dream and dance
With me, to nature's assonance."

Now drifting slowly round a sinuous curve
We came upon a brown and silent pool,
Deep with the depths of the damozel's eyes
Full of vague tremors, old regret, and new surmise.
No voice or eye of human kind were here
Except our own. I dropped my supple oar
And taking the book from Lillian's languid hand
Turned to her favorite sonnet. "Shall I read?"

Lillian's eyes were closed, low came her voice
As wood-winds sighing in a sunken vale,
As lutes that breathe upon a minstrel tale;
"Words are no longer beautiful to me,
I find within this pool all poetry,
But let us dream together, you and I
In quietness, between our pool and sky."

Oh! the poetry that lies
Beyond the dim and febrile boundaries
Of consciousness; a wan and fragile shore
That waking feet may never tread
Or waking eyes explore.
It is a land thrice circled round
By nettled skeins of gossamer,
Where silver thuribles of sound
Anoint the air and soothe the listening ear
With incense, rising like a soft and perfumed
prayer.

There we lay enchanted, half-asleep
Beneath our green and leafy-vaulted keep,
And as we dreamed, a wandering August breeze
Set silver pennies tinkling in the trees
And sent a truant wisp of Lillian's hair—
A wilful tendril—blowing in my face.
I turned; what future sorrows can erase
The memory of that moment in my heart?

Her blouse, half-opened at the throat, disclosed
Twin tender globes, her violet-veinéd breasts,
Whiter than bloodless roses, pale and proud,
And soft as lily-petals dipt in cloud.
Faint labyrinths of orchid tracery
Trembling in the rhythmical unrest
Of halcyon seas on summer afternoons.

So, till the languorous wind had died away
In drowsy innocence we lay.
Now came the sultry, solstice sun
Pyxed in the glowing monstrance of the noon.
Lillian opened wide her tranquil eyes
Allured to sleep by forest symphonies
And gazed upon the pool, all silently
Shimmering beneath the topaz-flaming sky
And spoke, half to herself and half to me:
"Even our dreams the blistering sun denies,
But if we bathe in this mysterious pool,
Dropt like an amber jewel from the skies,
We shall be fresh and cool
In body and in soul."
So saying, one by one she shed
The petals of her loveliness,
And standing naked as a violet
Uncalyxed, bound her rippling tress
Atop her head,
Her arms outspread
She dove—and for a moment vanishéd!

Lithe limbs
White and cool
Flash through the amber pool;
Lucent, dripping like a gem
Plunged in a liquid diadem,
Glistening shoulders gleam
And disappear, like grace-notes in a theme.

. . . .

Lillian, whose veins ran snow and Thasian wine
Lay singing in the depths of our canoe,
And as I paddled down the evening tide
Past verdurous meadows, towards the dying west,
Her singing faded with the sun
And rested, as a bird whose flight is done.
So tracing Hesperus through the western heaven
We reached an old and mossy-crusted wharf
Decked with a fringing scarf
Of water lilies. Then with willing hand
She helped me bring our shell to land;
Tenderly we stowed it, safe from harm,
Then walked together through the evening calm,
And Lillian prattled on
Of sweet familiar fancies, while the moon
Rose like a silver paten to the dome
Of Virgo, wheeling through her belted zone . . .

A gentle hand.
"Goodnight."
I stood alone.

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